

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 HA-05 /077 W
-----086572 072355Z /64

R 071630Z DEC 77
FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9902
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DUBLIN 2809

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK, EI
SUBJECT: POLITICAL TALKS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

REF: LONDON 19305

THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE IS TRANSMITTED IN BEHALF OF CONGEN
BELFAST:

1. SUMMARY: THE TALKS THAT BEGAN THE LAST WEEK OF
NOVEMBER BETWEEN SECRETARY OF STATE MASON AND THE FOUR MAIN
PARTIES ON - DEVOLUTION OF POWER T O NORTHERN IRELAND (REFTEL)
CONTINUE AT THE EXPERTS LEVEL. THE FOCUS HAS SHIFTED SOMEWHAT,
AS THE OFFICIAL UNIONISTS SHIFTED THEIR POSITION TO CONCEN-
TRATE ON THE RETURN OF "DEMOCRATIC" LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO NI.
DESPITE SKEPTICAL JUDGEMENTS FROM ALL SIDES, ALMOST ALL
PARTICIPANTS WANT TO TALK, AND INTEREST IN A RPROVINCIAL
ASSEMBLY REMAINS. END SUMMARY.

2. TALKS AT EXPERT LEVEL: NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE (NIO)
POLITICAL EXPERTS MEET SEPARATELY THIS WEEK WITH LEADERS
OF THE OFVFICIAL UNIONIST PARTY, IAN PAISLEY'S DEMO-
CRATIC UNIONISTS, AND THE ALLIANCE. PALYING ONE-
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UPMANSHIP, GERRY FITT OF THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND
LABOUR PARTY PUT OFF THE NIO'S INVITATION TO NEXT
WEEK. THE NIO INTENDS TO EXPLORE POLITICAL LEADERS'
REACTIONS TO THE FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR INTERIM DEVOLUTION
OF POWER SET FORTH BY MR. MASON IN LETTERS TO THE
PARTIES AFTER THE FIRST MEETINGS:

A. A SINGLE ASSEMBLY ELECTED BY PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION.

B. THE ASSEMBLY TO EXERCISE RESPONSIBILITY OVER A WIDE RANGE OF FUNCTIONS AND HAVE A CONSULTATIVE ROLE ON LEGISLATION.

C. THE ARRANGEMENT SHOULD BE TEMPORARY AND SHOULD ENVISAGE PROGRESS TOWARD FULL LEGISLATIVE DEVOLUTION.

D. BUT THE INTERIM ARRANGEMENT SHOULD BE DURABLE, WHICH MEANS THAT THE INTERESTS OF THE MINORITY MUST BE SAFEGUARDED.

E. THE ARRANGEMENT MUST MAKE GOOD ADMINISTRATIVE SENSE.

3. UNIONIST SHIFT AND THREATS: OFFICIAL UNIONISTS SAY FLIPPANTLY THAT THE FIRST FOUR PRINCIPLES CONTRADICT THE FIFTH. THE APPARENT EVOLUTION IN THEIR THINKING SINCE THEIR EARLY OCTOBER MEETING WITH MASON (PARA 4(A) REFTEL) SHIFTED RUDELY AS THE TALKS WERE EXTENDED TO THE OTHER PARTIES LAST MONTH. PARTY LEADERSHIP HAD BEEN DIVIDED ON EMPHASIS: THE WESTMINSTER LEADERS (JIM MOLYNEAUX AND ENOCH POWELL) PREFERRED A DEVOLUTION OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATIVE POWER AND WERE PROBABLY CONTENT TO SEE NI WITHOUT A REPLACEMENT FOR THE OLD, STRONG STORMONT GOVERNMENT. LOCAL UNIONIST LEADERS, LARGELY CUT OUT OF THE POLITICAL GAME, WANTED VERY MUCH A RETURN OF POWER TO BELFAST. BUT THEY APPARENTLY GAVE WAY AT A MEETING
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NOVEMBER 18, AND THE PARTY ABRUPTLY SHIFTED POLICY: FROM AN APPARENT WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER SERIOUSLY A PROVINCIAL ASSEMBLY WITH INTERIM POWERS, TO A STRONG PREFERENCE FOR THE RESTORATION OF "DEMOCRATIC" LOCAL GOVERNMENT. THEY HAVE NOT SAID CLEARLY WHAT THEY WANT, BUT THEY SEEM TO HAVE IN MIND THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL AND/OR CREATING SEVERAL -- PROBABLY THREE -- REGIONAL ASSEMBLIES IN ULSTER. LONDON 19304 REPORTED MASON'S SHARP REJECTION OF THE IDEA.

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INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 HA-05 /077 W
-----086698 072353Z /64

R 071630Z DEC 77
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4. JOLYNEAUX IN REPLY TO MASON THREATENED A CHANGE IN THE UNIONISTS' BENEVOLENCE TOWARD THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT, AND ON DECEMBER -H1, THE THEME WAS PICKED UP AUTHORITATIVELY BY LOCAL LEADER JOHN TAYLOR. HE QUESTIONED MASON'S GOOD FAITH AND ASCRIBED THE LAUNCHING OF THE TALKS TO PRESSURE ON PRIME MINISTER CJ CALLAGHAN FROM HIS IRISH COLLEAGUE. HE CONCLUDED THAT THE TIME MIGHT BE FAST APPAROROACHING WHEN THE UNIONISTS BOTH IN NI AND AT WESTMINSTER SHOULD SERVE NOTICE ON MASON THAT "HIS POLITICAL HONEYMOON" WAS OVER. AND TO SHARPEN THEIR POINT, THE UNIONISTS NOTE TORY SHADOW SECRETARY OF STATE AIREY NEAVES SUPPORT FOR A RESTORATION OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY.

5. GERRY FITT AND THE SDLP: DESPITE THE SHIFT IN UNIONIST POLICY AND THE ATTEMPT TO PRESSURE MASON, SOME UNIONISTS HERE WOULD STILL LOIKE TO MOVE TOWARD STORMONT. GERRY FITT SIMILARLY IS SKEPTICAL ABOUT MXASON'S MOTIVES AND THE CHANCES FOR THIS SCHEME, BUT WANTS AN INTERIM DEVOLUTION OF POWER AND WILL TALK SERIOUSLY. HE SAID PRIVATELY THAT THE SDLP COULD TAKE A COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE SUNNINGDALE ASSEMBLY AND THE UNIONIST-ORIENTED MAJORITY CONVENTION REPORT. HE STATES EMPHATICALLY, HOWEVER, THAT THE SDLP WILL NOT ACCEPT THE RETURN TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTR
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OF THE KIND OF DEMOCRACY THE UNIONISTS WANT. UNDER MAJORITY RULE, THEY WQOULD CONTROL ALL OR NEARLY ALL LOCAL BODIES IN INI, THUS RECREATING THE BASIS OF THE POWER SYSTEM THEY EXCULUSIVELY ENJOYED FOR 50 YEARS. MOREOVER, FITT WILL FILIBUSTER THE SPEAKER'S CONFERENCE ON INCREASING NI'S WESTMINSTER DELEGATION, SINCE HE BELIEVES A LARGER DELEGATION WOULD BENEFIT ONLY THE UNIONISTS AND WOULD INTEGRATE INI EVEN MORE INTO THE UK.

6. COMMENT: WE CAN EXPECT THAT SOME OF THIS POSTURING IS PART OF THE NEGOTIATION, WHICH INTERESTS BOTH OF THESE PARTIES. BUT BASIC LINES OF CONFRONTATION APPEAR HARD, AND

WE FIND NO OPTIMISTS IN NL.SHANNON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SITUATION, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 07-Dec-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977DUBLIN02809
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770455-0481
Format: TEL
From: DUBLIN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19771284/aaaactmr.tel
Line Count: 171
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 5a06160a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 77 LONDON 19305
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 332884
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: POLITICAL TALKS IN NORTHERN IRELAND
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, UK, EI
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/5a06160a-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009